

# Ingratiation

A Social Psychological Analysis

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## 2 Tactical Variations in Ingratiation

Ingratiation can, according to the present definition at least, take all or any of the forms by which interpersonal attraction may be solicited. When one considers the great number and variety of target persons toward whom ingratiating overtures might be directed, and the many interaction contexts in which such overtures might occur, it is clear that any attempt to develop a check list of specific "effective" tactics would be fruitless. It is probably true in general, however, that when we are dealing with ingratiating we are largely concerned with communicative behaviors which reflect the communicator's view of himself, aspects of the surrounding environment, and his esteem of the target person. In considering the kinds of communication which might achieve this purpose, we suggest that there are three major classes of ingratiating tactics: other-enhancement, opinion conformity, and self-presentation. We shall consider each of these in turn, along with a possible fourth class, that of giving gifts or rendering favors.

### COMPLIMENTARY OTHER-ENHANCEMENT

The first class of tactical variations involves communication of directly enhancing, evaluative statements. This class of tactics probably comes closest to the meaning of flattery in its

### TACTICAL VARIATIONS IN INGRATIATION

25

everyday usage. The ingratiator finds ways to express a high, positive, evaluation of the target person and emphasizes the latter's various strengths and virtues. He may distort and exaggerate the target person's admirable qualities to convey the impression that he thinks highly of him, but such direct duplicity is by no means an essential ingredient in behaviors of this class. The ingratiator may call attention to positive attributes which do, in fact, characterize the target person, but through errors of omission he may fail to develop the negative side of the ledger. Again, while it is fruitless to specify the particular responses which are likely to bring attraction out of other-enhancement, we may single out this class of tactics as one designed to convey the impression that the ingratiator thinks highly of the target person.

The effectiveness of other-enhancement as a tactic in the service of attraction-seeking seems to derive from the premise that people find it hard not to like those who think highly of them. Such a premise is accepted as a Gestalt axiom of social life by Heider, who declares that a dyad is unbalanced if one party likes the other, but is disliked by him (1958, p. 202). Heider's system is designed to reflect the phenomenal world of the reference person; therefore, if one person perceives that the other likes or respects him, that one person will have a tendency to move toward liking the other. If no such movement occurs, the target person will feel the subjective discomfort or strain that imbalance can bring. In data taken from many different groups in many different settings, Tagiuri (in Tagiuri and Petrullo, 1958) found a recurrent strong relationship between liking someone and perceiving that the someone reciprocated the attraction—or in his terms, between choosing and guessing the choices of others. This high degree of congruency between sociometric choice and guess, while not particularly surprising, provides empirical support for the Heider balance axiom. While it is no more plausible to conclude that the perception of being liked causes liking than to conclude that liking someone results in perceiving that the other reciprocates the attraction, congruence is presumably a result of both kinds of developments. A study by Jones, Gergen and Davis (1962) shows that subjects change in the direction of greater attraction toward a stimulus person who expresses his approval

of them as persons. The fact that other experimental studies with similar results could be cited leaves little room for doubt concerning the effect that perceiving attraction has on becoming attracted in return. The tactic of other-enhancement seems well rooted in the psychology of interpersonal attraction.

Our present focus on the use of compliments as an ingratiating tactic directs us to inquire into the *means* whereby one person convinces another that he admires or likes him. Curiously enough, the tactical problems are logically the same whether the one likes the other or not—it is the perception of being liked, not the actual fact of being liked, which is the crucial factor linking other-enhancement and attraction-seeking. Regardless of his private feelings about the target person, the ingratiator must present his "enhancing" compliments in a manner which assures or promotes their credibility. In most cultural contexts there are firm moral constraints against attempts at other-enhancement which stem from manipulative intentions. The sycophant cannot afford to have his true motives discovered, and (as we shall soon see) usually manages to conceal his ulterior intentions from himself. As an aid to concealment both from himself and from the target person, the effective enhancer wishes to establish the appropriate motivational context for his complimentary communication. This might be done by playing down his dependence on the target person in order to reduce the suspicion that he needs or expects to be benefited by him. This may be a matter of timing his remarks so that they occur in a context where the benefit desired is not a salient issue at that moment. Establishing the appropriate motivational context may also involve waiting for, and contributing to, states of "approval deprivation" so that compliments rendered will be more gratefully received.

One way to create a context for credibility is to arrange to have the compliment mediated by a third party. The advantages of such a strategy were early noted by Lord Chesterfield who recommended to his son the ". . . innocent piece of art; that of flattering people behind their backs, in the presence of who, to make their own court, much more than for your sake, will not fail to repeat and even amplify the praise to the party concerned. This is, of all flattery, the most pleasing and consequently the

most effectual" (Dunne edition, 1901, I, p. 179). We suggest that it is the "most pleasing" because credibility is established through the mediation process—there is in such cases no clear evidence that the originator of the compliment wanted or expected to have the compliment repeated.

It also seems obvious that, regardless of the context of the other-enhancing communication, credibility is affected by the inherent plausibility of the compliment. Outlandish or clearly unwarranted compliments are likely to prove embarrassing to the recipient and unlikely to secure the desired attraction. But it is not sufficient for the tactician to be merely credible. The communicator must deliver compliments which are more lavish than the recipient expects or thinks he deserves, and yet he must convey the impression that he himself believes them to be justified. Alternatively, he may settle for creating the impression that his compliments were well meant and selflessly motivated even though he may be perceived as stretching the point a little. If the communicator attributes characteristics about which the target person is himself quite certain and secure, the communicator may establish his credibility without necessarily increasing the esteem in which he is held. Or, if the communicator convinces the recipient of his praise that he, the recipient, really is a noble and virtuous fellow, there would be certain paradoxical effects. The more highly the recipient thinks of himself, the less he needs support from others, and the more justified and matter of course their compliments become. Lord Chesterfield puts the matter in a most engaging way:

Men have various objects in which they may excell, or at least would be thought to excell; and, though they love to hear justice done to them, where they know that they excell, yet they are most and best flattered upon those points where they wish to excell, and yet are doubtful whether they do or not. . . . The late Sir Robert Walpole, who was certainly an able man, was little open to flattery upon that head; for he was in no doubt himself about it; but his prevailing weakness was, to be thought to have a polite and happy turn to gallantry; of which he had undoubtedly less than any man living; it was his favorite and frequent subject of conversation; which proved, to those who had any penetration, that it was his prevailing weakness. And they applied to it with success (Dunne edition, 1901, I, p. 27).

At this point, there exists a pair of quite contradictory propositions: a person will like an admiring other to the extent that the person admired has high self-esteem or to the extent that he is dissatisfied with himself and hungers for reassurance. If one considers carefully the implications of Heider's balance theory, he would be forced to restrict his claim that perceived liking begets liking to those cases in which the person likes or places a high value on himself. In the theoretical development of their study, Deutsch and Solomon (1959) took the next logical step by predicting that when a person is led to have a low opinion of himself, he will tend to like another person who shares that low opinion. As Deutsch and Solomon point out, this tendency toward balance operates jointly with a "positivity effect"—that is, an additional tendency to like those who approve of you and to dislike those who disapprove, regardless of your level of self-evaluation. In their experiment, which involved the manipulation of a subject's success or failure followed by the receipt of an approving or disapproving note from another "team member," they found circumstantial evidence for the joint operation of these effects. Thus a subject was most positive toward one who wrote an approving note, and most negative toward one who wrote a disapproving note, after the subject had succeeded. Receiving an approving or a disapproving note after failure resulted in impressions of intermediate favorability. While both the balance theory derivation and the Deutsch and Solomon extension seem plausible, a quite contradictory alternative would suggest that people are especially pleased when other-enhancing compliments are directed toward their weaknesses. It is, so the argument might run, especially here that support from others is needed and will be maximally appreciated. Such an argument seems to underlie Lord Chesterfield's recommendation that the flatterer concentrate on the target person's weaknesses rather than his strengths. Nor is there a lack of empirical support for this alternative, though most of it is quite indirect and concerns reactions to criticism rather than approval. Jones, Hester, Farina, and Davis (1959), for example, found that subjects with low self-esteem were much more inclined than subjects with high self-esteem to rate negatively a student who had derogated them. Rosenbaum

and deCharms (1960) found that low self-esteem subjects were more negative in appraising someone who had verbally attacked them than were high self-esteem subjects.

Unfortunately, it is possible that in some circumstances the two contradictory "self-esteem hypotheses" may cancel each other out, with the result that one's self-evaluation appears to be irrelevant. Dickoff (1961) found that one's impressions of another are favorably affected by the amount of approval received, but that one's initial level of self-esteem does not affect the correlation between amount of approval received and impression granted. Thus her results provide support neither for the balance hypothesis nor for the hypothesis that low self-esteem persons show more gratitude for favorable feedback about themselves. The existence of the "positivity effect," on the other hand, was strongly confirmed in her study.

We are a long way from being able to specify the conditions under which these alternative hypotheses hold or to conclude that each is pervasive in its operation and somehow holds the other in check. For purposes of the present discussion, the issue might be tentatively resolved by stressing the role of uncertainty in the target person's response to compliments. This is clearly a part of Chesterfield's analysis, for it is a person's *doubts* about an attribute in which he wishes to excel which render him open to flattery. This statement suggests an interpretation of the Deutsch and Solomon results. If a person is quite convinced that he is poor in some ability, or unworthy in some area, compliments which tell him that he is good in that ability or area will appear incredible to him and raise suspicions of ulterior motivation. Certainly every effort was made in the Deutsch and Solomon study to convince the subjects that they had in fact succeeded or failed, and the notes conveying approval or disapproval must have varied in their credibility as a function of the experience they followed. For this reason, perhaps, we see little evidence that the failing subject is especially drawn to one who writes him an approving note. To the extent that a person is uncertain about an attribute he would like to possess, however, or to the extent that he needs reassurance about such an attribute, he presumably will respond to flattering compliments concerning the attribute

with increased attraction for the communicator. The sophisticated and artful flatterer may become an effective lay practitioner of this uncertainty reduction principle, making sure, of course, that the uncertainty is always reduced in the positive or favorable direction.

**Commitment and the criteria of evaluation.** In forecasting the most likely effects of his own behavior, the would-be ingratiator must realize that the acceptance of a complimentary evaluation is a function both of the criteria on which it seems to be based and of the extent to which the evaluation involves a commitment to present or future actions. Turning first to the criterion problem, it stands to reason that the more differentiated and discriminating the compliment, the more its validity may be precisely judged by the target person. The ingratiator may enhance his credibility by complicating his endorsement of the target person in various ways. One way of doing this is to concoct a judicious blend of the bitter and the sweet. Thus the ingratiator may acknowledge negative attributes in the target person of which the latter is fully aware and then go on to emphasize positive attributes of which the target person is uncertain. Such a tactic is clearly related to the use of the two-sided message in persuasive communications (Swanson, Newcomb, and Hartley, 1952, I and E division, pp. 506-519). Some risk is involved since the tactic requires that the ingratiator correctly intuit the target person's certainty about his own weaknesses and his willingness to acknowledge them.

Another way of complicating the endorsement in the interests of credibility is to avoid the use of ambiguous absolutes in favor of relative comparisons. The target person may be pleased to learn that the ingratiator judges him to be good on some dimension, but a compliment which specifically locates him as better than others he respects is apt to be more compelling and gratifying. What we are referring to here is the extent to which a compliment involves "weasel words" that can mean one thing to the communicator and another to the target person. As an aside it may be noted that many recommendation forms now require comparative or percentile judgments in addition to general

remarks about a candidate's qualities. In the academic community, if not in other contexts as well, professors are so likely to ingratiate on behalf of their job-seeking protégés that such procedures are designed to force them to be more discriminating. (Whether these forms succeed or not is a moot question.) One of the obvious factors underlying the target person's preference for comparative judgments of worth is the fact that such judgments involve more of a commitment on the part of the communicator. Unless the ingratiator is totally unprincipled, target person A may justly assume that the ingratiator will not tell him he is better than B and then tell B he is better than A. A major position of the present monograph is that ingratiators do things which conceal their ulterior motivation from themselves. For this reason, flattery and ingratiation tend to operate in a hinterland of ambiguity—where quick retreat is possible and where truth is difficult to verify. Also for this reason, the ingratiator who risks the dangers of being unambiguous may be that much more effective.

The role of commitment may be more clearly seen when the gesture intended to enhance another involves action with important consequences for the actor. Perhaps no compliment is as meaningful as being chosen on the first go-around, being given a clear promotion to a prestigious position, or a raise which is out of line with expectations. But here we are obviously on the borderline between ingratiation and fair exchange, since there is something inherent in these examples which implies that the target person's services are at least as valuable to the complimenter as his affection or respect. In keeping with our definitional discussion of the last chapter, however, it is to the ingratiator's tactical advantage to exploit the exchange process or the underlying norms of distributive justice. It cannot be ruled out, then, that raises are sometimes given for the gratitude and affection they purchase or that team choices may have ulterior significance as part of a strategy of winning friends.

A paradoxical consideration in the giving of compliments is the information revealed concerning the complimenter's expectations. If a person is lavishly complimented on some performance, he may very well conclude (depending on the context) that the

complimenteer had a rather low general opinion of him and may still have it. An important part of the context, presumably, is the target person's own view of the discrepancy between the particular performance and his level of ability. But it seems to be true that the better a person becomes at something, the less likely he is to receive compliments from those who have formed firm prior opinions of his ability and have established high expectations for him. This may help to explain the rather precarious position that athletic champions occupy in the public eye. Spectacular performances become routine and the "off day" may generate thunderous boos. It may also help to explain the commonly observed depressions of college freshmen who find it hard to adjust to the process of being evaluated by a higher and more demanding standard.

Returning to the notion that compliments may be more effective when they are comparative rather than absolute, the ingratiator may set the stage for his compliments by establishing in the eyes of the target person his own high standards for evaluating performance. This may be done, as implied above, by running down others in comparison or by criticizing initial performance efforts and by praising later ones. If these two tactics are used together, the paradoxical effect described above is not likely to occur. The target person will accept the compliment as hard won for his having met high standards and will not view it as a condescending gesture merely confirming the complimenteer's low general evaluation of the target person relative to others.

Mention should be made at this point of a recent (and as yet unpublished) experiment by Aronson and Linder. By an ingenious procedure, subjects were exposed to brief evaluations of themselves delivered by another person (a confederate of the experimenter) in a series punctuated by brief subject-other interactions. The subject was led to believe that the confederate was unaware that he, the subject, was in a position to monitor the incoming appraisals.

The confederate was best liked in a condition in which his early appraisals of the subject were uncomplimentary but became quite positive over time. The subject's evaluations were significantly more favorable in this "negative-positive" condition than

they were in a "positive-positive" condition characterized by uniformly complimentary appraisals. Since the confederate presumably did not realize he was being overheard by the subject, the appraisals in the uniformly positive condition could not realistically be viewed as deliberately flattering by the subject. It may be that the subject preferred the negative-positive confederate because his praise represented more of a hard-earned victory, won from a competent and discerning person who does not give praise easily. Aronson and Linder also suggest that the initial negative appraisal is upsetting to the subject and that the ultimate positive appraisal produced greater final liking because it reduced a high-drive state. As suggested earlier, the ingratiator may make his compliments count far more by first arousing a condition of approval deprivation. Aronson and Linder present internal evidence to show that the more the subject acknowledged being upset in the negative-positive condition, the more favorable were his final evaluations of the confederate. These closely related interpretations—evidence of competence and drive-state reduction—will be considered further in subsequent discussions of the effectiveness of various ingratiation tactics.

Also relevant in this context of establishing credibility is the fact that other-enhancement may paradoxically be expressed by apparent deflation of the other, as evidenced by the phenomenon of the friendly insult. Masculine small talk, especially, is frequently peppered with barbs, derogation, and sarcasm. The recipient of a friendly insult is given notice that he (a) has the attention of the communicator and (b) has the strength and good nature to survive such an attack. He may also infer from the tone and the context that the insulting comment is actually inapplicable to him, for if it were true it would never have been offered. Friendly insults serve another purpose as well: they provide a contrasting backdrop for the expression of occasional (but nevertheless highly important) positive comments. Such comments from one who is known for his caustic wit and malicious sense of humor are all the more significant to the recipient.

**Spontaneous versus fished-for compliments.** Perhaps one of the poorest ways to find out what others think of us is to ask

them. There are, of course, settings in which one person may seek and obtain a valid appraisal of himself from another. Physicians, employers, teachers, family members, and close friends may comment candidly on certain of our foibles as well as our virtues. By and large, however, when people ask us what we think of them—either generally or on some specific dimension—they do not necessarily crave the truth. We have already commented in the preceding chapter on the fact that people want both accurate and pleasant information about themselves and that they are therefore ambivalent about seeking out information sources that might convey unpleasant truths. When we are asked for our opinions about another, we often sense that they would prefer our compliments to our candor and act accordingly—for either humanitarian or devious reasons. Undoubtedly the target person himself is aware that the more avidly he seeks information from others the more invalid it is likely to be, since it is commonly understood that such information-seeking is often motivated by the need for support rather than by the need for genuine appraisal. In any event, it would seem that the ingratiator, bent on convincing a target person of his genuine admiration for him, would arrange to deliver spontaneous compliments as well as to respond with praise whenever the bait is offered. In fact, the ingratiator may learn from the fishing-for-compliments episodes just what the target person's areas of uncertainties are and exploit this knowledge in subsequent spontaneous praise.

#### CONFORMITY IN OPINION, JUDGMENT, AND BEHAVIOR

A second class of tactics available to the ingratiator is that which involves conforming in various ways to the target person. Experimental investigations into the conditions of conformity have been numerous during the past decade, and we now know a great deal more about the nature of conformity than we did at the end of the Second World War. The bulk of these studies, however, have focused on conformity as a response to social influence pressures rather than as a tactic of social influence

in its own right. Those who have emphasized the fact that conformity tends to increase when opinions are monitored by one or more target persons, over the level of agreement when there is no such monitoring (e.g. Deutsch and Gerard, 1955), have recognized the factor of attraction-seeking or attraction maintenance. But the present discussion makes even more emphatic the possible role of conformity in securing attraction and deals with agreement and imitation as witting or unwitting strategies of ingratiation.

Whereas the tactic of other-enhancement attempts to capitalize on the proposition that persons like those who appear to like them, the conformity tactic follows another proposition: persons like those whose values and beliefs appear to be similar to their own. Like the earlier proposition, the present one is clearly stated by Heider (1958) as an interpersonal axiom and strongly supported by abundant research evidence showing that similarity of values and interests leads to selective association and mutual attraction (e.g. Newcomb, 1961). The tactic of opinion conformity ranges from simple agreement with expressed opinions, through more elaborate attempts to articulate the position presumed to be held by the other, to the most complex forms of behavior imitation and identification. Thus there may be much or little cost incurred by the conformity tactician since the tactic may involve complex diagnostic work or simple reflexive agreement. The more elaborate forms of conveying similarity of beliefs or opinions are often the most effective but also the most difficult and costly to initiate and maintain. Even the most casual concessions to the opinions of another may be emotionally or cognitively costly if the new opinions must be maintained over extensive time periods. Public agreement which coexists with private disagreement should in itself produce cognitive dissonance, especially when the new opinion must be maintained in front of those other than the primary target (if only because the latter is present and attending) and when it requires adjustments in related opinions. The fact that opinion conformity has these repercussions may provide some basis for the aphorism, "imitation is the sincerest flattery." It is judged to be sincere precisely because it tends to be psychologically costly.

The relationship between conformity and ingratiation is not a simple one. On the one hand, if a person likes the one who shares his beliefs and opinions and there is nothing more involved, then the goal of the conformist is to convey his genuine, independently derived agreement with this person. It is also quite possible, however, that ingratiation may be furthered by manifest opinion change. In some contexts, the ingratiator may be liked more by the target person if he starts out with a divergent opinion but is gradually converted to the target person's position, than if he starts out agreeing with the target person. This tactic is one way by which the conformist can advertise the psychological costs incurred. In giving up an opinion after showing a certain amount of resistance, the belated conformist may be perceived as paying a costly tribute to the target person's superior wisdom and he may, therefore, be rewarded with the attraction he seeks.

Gerard and Greenbaum (1962) present interesting evidence in this connection. We have already suggested that compliments are especially effective if the recipient is uncertain about the degree to which he possesses the attribute being complimented. Gerard and Greenbaum's data provide support for a similar conclusion in the area of judgmental uncertainty. In their experiment, each subject was confronted by repeated disagreement from two of three peers on a series of judgments concerning unambiguous stimuli. The judgments of these two peers always preceded the subject's judgment, while the third peer's judgment always followed the subject's. The third peer either agreed with the subject on each judgment, agreed with the first two and disagreed with the subject, or, depending on the treatment condition, he began to agree with the subject after initially disagreeing with him for varying periods of time. Once he began to agree with the subject he continued to agree with him from that point on. Lateness of the "switch" to agreement was the experimental variable. There were four subjects in each of 12 conditions ranging from "early switch" to "late switch."

Gerard and Greenbaum were primarily interested in the subject's impression of the peer whose judgment followed the subject's as a function of the point at which the latter began to

agree with him. They found, of course, that the subject was most unfavorable in his evaluation of the peer when the latter always disagreed with him. It was also found that the subject was most favorable when the peer always agreed with him. Data from the "switch" treatments showed that the peer was liked relatively more when the switch was quite early or quite late than when the switch was moderately late. Gerard and Greenbaum argue that positive evaluation of the early switcher has the same basis as affection for the peer who always agreed: because we have learned the value of allies in past attempts to interpret reality, we generally like those who appear to support our views. Positive evaluation of the late-switching peer contrasted sharply with the negative evaluation of a peer who never switched. Gerard and Greenbaum suggest that the relatively positive reaction to the late-switching peer is a function of the degree of uncertainty reduction which he provides at this point. Presumably the longer the subject goes without an ally, the more uncertain he becomes. The subjects rated their judgmental confidence on each trial and there was clear evidence that confidence decreased the greater the number of trials on which the subject was confronted with unanimous disagreement. It was also true that the later the switch the greater the *increment* in confidence on the trial immediately following the switch.

If we were to view the subject as the target person and the third peer as the potential ingratiator, the Gerard and Greenbaum findings suggest that consistent conformity or conformity preceded by sufficient resistance to raise the target person's uncertainty, are both effective stratagems for gaining approval. In one case uncertainty arousal is prevented, in the other it is reduced after reaching an uncomfortable extreme. The uncertainty reduction hypothesis may be seen as a special case of the drive reduction hypothesized in the negative-positive condition of the Aronson and Linder study (see above).

As Gerard and Greenbaum point out, the increased attractiveness granted in the late-switch treatments may also have been due to an assumed contingency between the subject's behavior and the peer's switch. A derivation from dissonance theory (supported by Aronson, 1961) is that subjects become attracted to

objects to the extent that effort was expended in acquiring them. This would help to account for the greater liking of the negative-positive versus the positive-positive confederate in the Aronson and Linder experiment. It also might account for the Gerard-Greenbaum results. The object in the Gerard and Greenbaum study was agreement from the third peer, and the subjective experience of effort may relate to the amount of resistance which the subject had to overcome—the lateness of the switch. While this alternative is a possibility, the fact remains that uncertainty is great during the later trials before the switch, markedly reduced by the late switch, and the positive impression of the late-switching peer is quite consistent with an uncertainty reduction hypothesis.

The ingratiator's success in managing to express opinions which are similar to the target person's would appear to be an effective tactic whether or not there is any perception that the similarity is the result of a change in opinions. Indeed, it seems intuitively obvious that the lower the status of the ingratiator relative to the target person, the more the effectiveness of the conformity tactic depends on concealing any evidence that a conforming *change* in opinions has occurred. This may be accomplished by occasional disagreements in unimportant areas, or by attempts to anticipate as yet unexpressed opinions of the other person. For example, if the ingratiator strongly criticizes the President of the United States before the target person has expressed his own negative feelings, the target person will probably not question the sincerity of the ingratiator. The target person would have occasion to be more suspicious of an adaptive or tactical change to the extent that he had previously made his own position clear. This suggests that an important resource for the sophisticated tactician is his ability to deduce unstated opinions from stated ones. This is especially important, presumably, when the tactician is lower in status than the target person.

The advantage of being able to express opinions similar to the target person's before the latter has made his known is confirmed in a study by Jones, Jones, and Gergen (1963). In that study subjects listened to a dialogue between two other students.

One student, Mike, always agreed very closely with the other, Paul, in expressing his opinions on a variety of issues. In half of the cases, Mike went first and Paul second; in the remaining cases the sequence was reversed. In predicting Paul's feelings about Mike, subjects predicted more positive evaluations when Mike expressed his opinions first. They saw Mike as much more conforming and manipulative when his opinions were given in response to those of Paul. The opinions actually expressed by Mike were identical in the two cases.

We might comment, finally, on the tactical value of differential conformity and the bases for deciding the crucial issues on which conformity is most likely to win the attraction that is sought. Again we may follow up an implication of Festinger's social comparison process and suggest that the target person is likely to be most appreciative of agreement when he wants to believe that something is true but is not sure that it is. Since slavish or indiscriminate agreement may be transparent and therefore fall of its own weight, the sophisticated tactician may be more successful in his ingratiation attempt by combining disagreements in trivial or unimportant areas with agreements on those issues in which the target person needs support for a shaky but congenial conviction. It is at this point that the earlier-stated principles governing selective other-enhancement coincide, in effect, with the principles of differential conformity.

A related basis for deciding when to conform and when not to conform is the relevance of the opinion issue to the relationship and to the business to be transacted therein. A study by Schachter (1951) showed that more pressure toward uniformity is generated on issues relevant to the group's goals than on issues that are less relevant. While there is little additional evidence that bears on this point, Festinger (1954) states as a corollary of his social comparison theory, "The greater the relevance of the opinion or ability to the group, the stronger will be the pressure toward uniformity concerning that opinion or ability" (p. 132). In chapter six, we shall present detailed evidence indicating that high-status ingratiators conform more on irrelevant issues while low-status ingratiators conform more on relevant ones. For the moment, we conclude with the suggestion that an effective in-

gratiation tactic would be to establish credibility by disagreeing mildly on irrelevant issues and to win attraction in safety by agreeing enthusiastically on relevant ones. The problem of defining relevance may, of course, be extremely difficult in some relationships, and the notion of relevance does not lend itself neatly to operational realization as an experimental variable.

#### SELF-PRESENTATION

A third tactic of ingratiation involves the explicit presentation or description of one's own attributes to increase the likelihood of being judged attractive. In the present context self-presentation refers both to those communications which are explicitly self-descriptive: "I am the kind of person who . . .," "One of my weaknesses is . . .," "Compared to most men I am . . ."; and to more indirect communicative shadings which convey the same kind of information about how a person wishes to be viewed by others.

In speculating on the uses to which self-presentation may be put in the service of ingratiation, it seems obvious that there are many kinds of impressions to be avoided in a particular culture. In the American adolescent culture, for example, a person reduces his attractiveness to others when he conveys an impression of boastfulness and conceit, of rudeness and lack of consideration, of spitefulness and malice, or of deceit and crass opportunism. Therefore, the successful tactician wants to avoid sending out cues which point to any of these attributes. Beyond this, however, there are many subtleties which determine the attractiveness of one's projected self. In attempting to gain another person's favor, the ingratiator must consider that person's idiosyncratic preferences and those commonly associated with persons in his role or position, as well as the values embraced by the general culture. That is, the ingratiator should present himself in different ways as a function of his perceptions of the target person's likes and dislikes, the more so, the more motivated he is to be accepted by the target person. In this context, then, the ingratiating person is one who models himself along the lines of

the target person's suggested ideal, or at least who communicates his success in approximating this ideal.

This point has a general significance which underlies the entire range of tactics that may be employed by an ingratiator. The decision to communicate other-enhancing compliments, for example, will be affected by perceptions of the target person's vanity. Whether or not conformity will be effective as a tactic for winning favor depends on the target person's values concerning social accommodation and congeniality versus ruthless candor in interpersonal relations. In chapter six we shall see this last proposition supported in an experiment by Jones, Gergen, Gumpert and Thibaut (in press).

There are two distinct and quite contradictory forms that self-presentation may take in the interests of securing the favor of another. A person may present himself in such a way as to advertise his strengths and virtues, or he may present himself in such a way as to enhance by implication the strengths and virtues of the target person. In the preceding chapter we derived from Homans' (1961) distinctions the suggestion that a person may lay a claim to preferred outcomes in an exchange if he is able to convince the other of his high "investments." The term investment was not formally defined, but we followed Homans in pointing to such attributes as age, education, expertise, and other ingredients of what might be called social status. If the ingratiator can convince the target person that he brings valuable investments to the interchange, he will presumably be looked upon with greater respect and admiration than he might otherwise have been. This would place him in a better position to influence the target person on his behalf. Jones, Gergen, and Davis (1962) and Gergen (1962) found that female undergraduate subjects responded to instructions encouraging them to make themselves attractive to another person by describing themselves very favorably—significantly more favorably than when instructed to be their natural selves. We may tentatively conclude that exaggerating strengths and minimizing weaknesses is the prepotent response to instructions emphasizing the creation of a positive impression, though the empirical generality of

this proposition is unknown and it is certain that a caveat of *ceteris paribus* should be attached.

There are certain risks involved in such self-enhancement or investment advertisement. The credibility of a self-description is obviously an all-important condition for its effectiveness in establishing a face or a claim to certain investments. Then too, a person who attempts to enhance himself in competition with, or at the expense of, another, is unlikely to elicit attraction or preferred treatment for his efforts. Self-enhancement often carries with it implications of invidious comparison with the target person. The obverse of self-aggrandizement is of course self-deprecation or humility, which has its own value as a tactic of ingratiatation. By emphasizing his weaknesses and lack of investments, a person reduces the likelihood of being considered a competitive threat and he aligns himself with such important cultural values as modesty and objectivity of self-appraisal. Confessions of weakness increase one's dependence on a relationship and render one vulnerable to exploitation, but one's dependence may also make salient the norms of *noblesse oblige* and the Christian ideal of the strong helping the weak. Modesty, humility, and the acknowledgement of one's dependence may derive their effectiveness as ingratiatation tactics from their contribution to an implicit other-enhancement. This is especially clear when one emphasizes one's inadequacies in the process of asking for advice or assistance. Such requests generally imply admiration or respect for the potential advisor. Because such appeals for advice play directly on the vanity of the recipient, Plutarch (Goodwin edition, 1889) felt that this was a particularly insidious form of flattery.

In much the same manner, one who reveals intimate personal experiences or feelings to another implies respect for the other's understanding, tolerance, or discretion. One also implies by such intimate self-revelation that one does not fear exploitation by the target person, that one trusts him, and that one would like the relationship to continue and deepen.

Since self-enhancement and self-deprecation are clearly contradictory presentational tactics, it is important to establish the conditions under which one is more effective than the other and vice versa. One important factor is the obviousness and the

security of the ingratiator's investments. If a person is widely acknowledged to be the best in his field, if he wears a star on his shoulder, if it is clear that he comes from a "first family,"—in short, if his high investments are undeniable public knowledge—he will be more ingratiating if he does *not* stress these investments, but instead responds with modesty and humility in front of the target person. If, on the other hand, the investments of the potential ingratiator are low, uncertain, or unknown to others, he will be inclined to emphasize his positive attributes and conceal his weaknesses. We are not suggesting that low-investment or low-status people will describe themselves more positively than will high-investment people. What we are saying is that those whose investments are obvious will become modest when motivated to seek attraction, and those whose investments are uncertain will become more immodest under such motivation. As we shall see in chapter six, an experiment by Jones, Gergen, and Jones (1963) provides qualified support for this hypothesis.

It should not be assumed, of course, that persons attempting to create a favorable impression always make some basic decision either to exaggerate their strengths or to play them down. Common sense tells us that people are generally going to strike some kind of balance in delineating positive and negative attributes of the self. To say nothing but good things about oneself clearly smacks of conceit and exaggeration; constantly to stress one's bad features vexes and embarrasses the listener, generally leaving him with no response beyond repetitive reassurance. The psychologist's task of developing predictions about self-presentation is one which involves specifying the conditions which determine the general favorability of one's self-depiction *and* the particular pattern of attributes which are acknowledged and denied.

### RENDERING FAVORS

A logical candidate for the status of an ingratiatation tactic is the giving of favors, since persons are likely to be attracted to those who do nice things for them. The main question is whether the rendering of favors is fruitfully viewed as an

ingratiation tactic or whether it is simply a case of open social exchange—one person obligates the other by performing a service at some cost in a context where the norms of distributive justice presumably apply. Attraction might or might not be a byproduct in such a case. Ingratiation involves more than the manipulation of obligation; by our definition, attraction is illicitly sought, and any favors the ingratiator hopes to obtain are the consequence of having made oneself attractive. In certain cases, a favor or gift is presented under conditions which make reciprocation in kind difficult or impossible. The only available response of the recipient might be attraction for the other person because of his selfless generosity. An ingratiator might take advantage of such a possibility and make himself more attractive without benefiting in any other way from his generosity. While this possibility exists, the essential factor in such an award of attraction seems to be the self-reflecting value of the favor or gift under the given circumstances. It therefore seems that the ingratiating significance of the presentation of gifts and favors can be dealt with under the heading of self-presentation and that no separate category is required. It should not be concluded, however, that gifts and favors are unimportant in the cementing of friendships or in the more general context of social influence. To paraphrase Homans, we influence others to give us the things we want more than they do, by giving them the things they want more than we do. In chapter four, a more formal analysis of this exchange process will be undertaken in an attempt to clarify the relationship between legitimate social exchange and ingratiating.

#### SUMMARY

In the present chapter we have attempted to lay out an informal taxonomy of those tactics which may, and often do, operate in the service of ingratiating. Establishing such a taxonomy, if only in the most preliminary form, is a prerequisite for research planning and the search for dependent variables appropriate to given experimental conditions. While acknowl-

edging that almost any observable act or gesture can serve, on occasion, to create a more or less favorable impression in the eyes of the observer, we proposed that other-enhancement, conformity, and self-presentation are the three most obvious classes within which tactical responses fall. With respect to responses in each of these classes, the primary problem of the ingratiator is to convince the target person that his communications are not unduly shaped by pragmatic considerations and are congruent with the ingratiator's private convictions. The content of the communication and/or the context in which it is presented must be so arranged as to establish the credibility of the communicator. To be effective in eliciting attraction, however, the communication must be more than merely credible. It must represent an idea, judgment, or position in which the target person wishes to believe, but about which he is to some extent uncertain. Other-enhancing compliments are, then, most effective when addressed to such desirable but uncertain attributes. Conformity is most likely to be gratifying to the target person if it represents support for a personally important but controversial opinion. Self-presentations may also be designed to make the target person feel secure in his own position or self-judgment. Especially under conditions where a person's status or power (his investments, in Homans' terms) are equivocal, however, the individual may respond to pressures to make himself attractive by immodest emphasis on his strengths and virtues. Gifts and favors may be exploited by the ingratiator to secure attraction, but this may be viewed as a kind of self-presenting behavior and the significance of favors for ingratiating seems amply covered by including them under the heading of self-presentation.